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Computer & Internet Monitoring as a Treatment Tool

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In 2003, I provided the attached article entitled "Computer and Internet Monitoring as a Treatment Tool", that was published in News & Views, the bi-weekly newsletter of the United States Probation and Pretrial System. While some of the terminology has changed, with Internet Relay Chat and newsgroups being replaced by Facebook, Instagram and public message boards, the concept remains the same. The proper analysis of data captured from computer & Internet monitoring

technologies is extremely important and valuable in treatment settings, especially with individuals convicted of sex offenses. Countless times over my career as a Senior U.S. Probation Officer - Cybercrime Specialist for the Eastern District of New York, I discovered information that led to treatment conferences with myself, the therapist and the individual under supervision. Those conferences addressed the individual's behaviors, impulses, etc. and put together a plan of action to address those behaviors (i.e. increased sessions, polygraph exams, etc.). A key factor is that oftentimes the information discovered was not necessarily illegal or even a violation of conditions but something as innocuous as a YouTube video that suggested the individual was beginning to fall into inappropriate behavior. By intervening early with the treatment provider, we were able to address these behaviors before they became more serious. These interventions most likely prevented further violations and possibly even the victimization of children.

Kathleen Castro, MA, LMHC, (KatCastro@SeekingSolaceNYC.org) is an experienced mental health professional with a demonstrated history of working in the forensic and mental health field. Her experience includes working as a therapist for mental health/sex offender treatment providers who provide contracted treatment services to both federal and state probation and parole agencies. She holds a Master's Degree focused in Forensic Mental Health Counseling from City University of New York-John Jay College of Criminal Justice. I had the honor of working directly with Kathleen on several high risk sex offender cases and asked for her insight on this topic.

K. Castro: *For over a decade, I have facilitated sex offender treatment, conducted risk assessments, and collaborated with various law enforcement agencies. My current clinical focus is in private practice and research involving the impact of excessive pornography use. During my clinical work with offenders convicted of an Internet-based sex offense, I experienced the value of computer and internet monitoring as it pertains to the treatment process and how it impacts issues that are addressed during treatment.*

Internet and computer monitoring provides extra insight into behaviors that might otherwise go unaddressed in treatment. During my work with this population, data reviews led to pertinent treatment issues such as an offender viewing inappropriate YouTube videos, problematic Internet searches, and indirect contact with minors through social media sites. Addressing this in treatment compelled offenders to increase accountability, identify red-flags, and to discuss underlying issues that led to this behavior. Having access to data provided through Internet and computer monitoring leads to early treatment interventions, provides opportunity to address pertinent mental health issues, and has the potential to assist the offender in working through underlying issues before they become problematic. For example, addressing inappropriate YouTube videos can lead to an offender discussing needs that they are attempting to meet through this behavior such as relief from depression, anxiety, loneliness, etc. As a therapist, this is crucial in treatment, therefore having Internet and computer monitoring is essential to working with this population.

IPPC will soon offer Spotlight, an analysis service that will verify content highlighted by existing automated tools already featured in IPPC's monitoring solutions. This will greatly reduce the amount of content officers need to review, that may not be relevant to a case, and give those officers the streamlined and verified leads they need to follow up on concerning behavior. Analysis will be ongoing ensuring quick responses to any issue. Immediate notifications will be available for content that meets the criteria. For more information, please contact me at bkelly@ippctech.net or by calling 888 WEB-IPPC (932-4772) extension 535.



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Computer and Internet Monitoring as a Treatment Tool

by Cybercrime Specialist

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Most probation and pretrial services officers think of computer and Internet monitoring as a risk control tool—a method either to detect or deter use. But the data compiled from computer and Internet monitoring tools also can be used in the treatment process.

An offender's computer and Internet activity can be a window of insight into his or her thought process. Those whose offenses directly relate to

the use of computers and/or the Internet often possess above average intelligence and computer skills. They are often self-taught and have been exposed to the technology for a number of years. These offenders also may have substituted the Internet for social interaction. The sense of anonymity that comes with using the Internet allows people to be anything they want to be. Someone who may have been a loner in high school can feel a sense of power when presenting his or her point of view in a news group discussion or an Internet relay chat room. The amount of time spent and the varying times of day an offender uses the computer can be indications of possible problems. Activity during late evening and early morning hours may be a sign of insomnia—a leading symptom of depression and other mood disorders. And though the actual existence of “Internet addiction” or abnormal Internet use is still a subject of debate in the mental health community, there is a vast amount of information available on this topic on sites such as <http://www.netaddiction.com/> and <http://mentalhealth.about.com/>. In the Eastern District of New York, officers work with treatment providers to counsel offenders who are heavy computer/ Internet users to find alternative, healthier ways to spend their time.

The content of an offender’s computer and Internet activity can say a lot about his or her state of mind. An officer can gain much insight from reviewing an offender’s on-line purchases, message boards/newsgroups, and online games. Visiting web sites, for example, or discussing suicide or urine cleansing products to avoid drug detection are some of the most obvious signs that the offender may be experiencing personal problems. One of the most common situations our district has encountered is offenders reading news material about their criminal cases on the Internet.

While they may say they are just curious, it may be an indication that they are constantly reliving their involvement in the instant offense as a self-destructive mechanism. Examining all data captured via computer and Internet monitoring and maintaining an open line of communication with treatment providers can simply be another method for officers to address offender issues proactively rather than reactively.



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